

November 20, 2022 – Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
Indebtedness to the Sovereignty of Christ as My Lifelong Commitment
Gospel of Luke 23:35-43
Fr. Oliver

This Sunday, at the end of Church's liturgical year, the readings describe the enthronement of the victorious Christ as King in Heaven in all his glory. Instituting this Feast of Christ the King in 1925, Pope Pius XI proclaimed: "*Pax Christi in regno Christi*" (the peace of Christ in the reign of Christ). This means that we live in the peace of Christ when we surrender our lives to him every day, accept him as our God, Saviour, and King and allow him to rule our lives.

In our gospel we hear that Christ who is the King of all is being nailed on the cross with the two criminals. What a pity! What a scandal on our part. A King, who is supposed to be in His palace, sitting in His throne and surrounded with His advisers and thousands of soldiers is now being humiliated and crucified? Here we see Christ hanging on the cross with no one to turn to. All His followers and friends are leaving Him. They are afraid that they may also be crucified like their Lord and master and that their lives are in danger. They are not committed to Him. The people and soldiers are mocking at Him, insulting Him, and laughing at Him because their own idea of what a king is, is not met by Jesus. They are frustrated with Jesus. They were expecting a Messiah who would liberate them from the domination of foreign powers and here comes Jesus being humiliated and degraded.

Polycarp, the second century bishop of Smyrna, was brought before the Roman authorities and told to curse Christ and he would be released. He replied, "Eighty-six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong: how then can I blaspheme my King, Jesus Christ, who saved me?" The Roman officer replied, "Unless you change your mind, I will have you burnt." But Polycarp said, "You threaten a fire that burns for an hour, and after a while is quenched; for you are ignorant of the judgment to come and of everlasting punishment reserved for the ungodly. Do what you wish." He was condemned to be burnt at the stake, and the sentence was carried out, but the flames did not touch him, so his executioners had to stab him to death. Only through the grace of Holy Perseverance for which he asked God, was Polycarp enabled to remain faithful through all his trials. We all need to ask God for that same grace daily, if we would be with God in Heaven!

This feast was established and proclaimed by the Pope to reassert the sovereignty of Christ and the Church over all forms of government and to remind Christians of the fidelity and loyalty they owed to Christ, who by his Incarnation and sacrificial death on the cross had made them both adopted children of God and future citizens and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Feast was also a reminder to the totalitarian governments of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin that Jesus Christ is the only Sovereign King. Christ is our spiritual King and Ruler who rules by truth and love. We declare our loyalty to him by the quality of our Christian commitment, expressed in our serving of others with sacrificial and forgiving love, and by our solidarity with the poor. In thousands of human hearts all over the world, Jesus still reigns as King. The Cross is his throne and the Sermon on the Mount, his rule of law. His citizens need obey only one major law: "*Love God with all your being, and love others as I have loved you.*" His love is selfless, compassionate, forgiving, and unconditional. He is a King with a saving and liberating mission: freeing us from all types of bondage, enabling us to live peacefully and happily on earth, and promising us an inheritance in the eternal life of heaven.

The first reading (2 Samuel 5:1-3) describes all the tribes of Israel choosing Israel's second king, the great David, as their "shepherd" and "commander." David's successful 40-year reign became the model for the hoped-for Messiah – the Christ or the Anointed One in later Judaism.

In the second reading (Colossians 1:12-20), Paul quoting an early Christian hymn, assures the Colossian Christians of: (1) the primacy of Christ over and above all angels and cosmic powers; (2) the value and necessity of the cross; and (3) the cosmic effects of salvation.

Today's Gospel (Luke 23:35-43) presents Christ the King as reigning, not from a throne, but from the cross. Like the "*suffering servant*" of Isaiah (53:3), Jesus is despised and rejected, as the bystanders ridicule the crucified King, challenging him to prove his Kingship by coming down from the cross. The Gospel also tells of the criminal crucified beside Jesus who recognized Jesus as a Saviour King and asked Jesus to remember him when he entered his kingdom. Jesus promised the good thief, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise!" Tradition remembers the criminal on Jesus' right side as "*the good thief*" who repented of his sins at the last moment, though Mark and Matthew call him a "*revolutionary*." Although the Romans intended the inscription on the cross, "*This is the King of the Jews*," to be ironic, it reflected the popular Jewish speculations about Jesus' possible identity as the Messiah of Israel. For Luke and other early Christians that title was correct, since the Kingship of Jesus was made manifest most perfectly in his suffering and death on the cross, followed by his Resurrection on the third day, as he had foretold.

One day a kindergarten teacher nun said to the class of 5-year-olds, "I'll give \$2 to the child who can tell me who was the most famous man who ever lived." An Irish boy put his hand up and said, "It was St. Patrick." The teacher said, "Sorry Sean, that's not correct." Then a Scottish boy put his hand up and said, "It was St. Andrew." The teacher replied, "I'm sorry, Hamish, that's not right either. Finally, a Jewish boy raised his hand and said, "It was Jesus Christ." The teacher said, "That's absolutely right, Marvin, come up here and I'll give you the \$2." As the teacher was giving Marvin his money, she said, "You know Marvin, you being Jewish, I was very surprised you said Jesus Christ." Marvin replied, "Yeah. In my heart I knew it was Moses, but business is business..."

What is the Kingdom of God? What is the Kingdom of Christ the King? Here is a beautiful explanation given by Gerald Darring (St. Louis University: *Center for Liturgy*): **The Kingdom of God is a space.** It exists in every home where parents and children love each other. It exists in every region and country that cares for its weak and vulnerable. It exists in every parish that reaches out to the needy. **The Kingdom of God is a time.** It happens whenever someone feeds a hungry person, or shelters a homeless person, or shows care to a neglected person. It happens whenever we overturn an unjust law, or correct an injustice, or avert a war. It happens whenever people join in the struggle to overcome poverty, to erase ignorance, to pass on the Faith. The Kingdom of God is **in the past** (in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth); it is **in the present** (in the work of the Church and in the efforts of many others to create a world of goodness and justice); it is **in the future** (reaching its completion in the age to come). **The Kingdom of God is a condition.** Its symptoms are love, justice, and peace. Jesus Christ is king! We pray today that God may free all the world to rejoice in his peace, to glory in his justice, to live in his love. **Today's Feast of Christ the King** reminds us of the great truth that Christ must be in charge of our lives and we must give him sovereign power over our

bodies, our thoughts, our heart, and our will. In every moral decision we face, there's a choice between Christ the King and Barabbas, and the one who seeks to live in Christ's Kingdom is the one who says, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.*" Today let us resolve to allow nothing other than Jesus' love and example to rule over us.